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SUBJECT: BULGARIA: SOFIA ELECTS FIRST WOMAN MAYOR

¶1. (SBU) The ruling Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) party consolidated its power with the election of current Education Minister Yordanka Fandakova as mayor of Sofia. Sofia held mayor by-elections on November 15 to replace former mayor, Boyko Borissov, who became Prime Minister after general elections in July. Fandakova received 66 percent of votes. Her closest rival, Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) candidate Georgi Kadiev, received 28 percent of the votes. Voter turnout was the lowest on record with only 23 percent of the population showing up at the polls.

¶2. (SBU) The 47-year-old Fandakova is a relatively new face in Bulgarian politics. After a 20-year career as a teacher and school principal, she was appointed by then-Mayor Boyko Borissov, as his deputy in charge of education in 2005. As Minister of Education, she became one of the three most popular members of the GERB cabinet. Fandakova is the first woman elected mayor of Sofia.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The Prime Minister's GERB party continues to consolidate power in Bulgaria. As mayor, Fandakova faces a laundry list of problems: lack of a modern urban planning system, a poorly organized public transportation system, serious traffic gridlock, endemic corruption and a lack of facilities for children and disabled persons. As a member of the ruling party, Fandakova will have to find real solutions to these problems, since blaming her predecessor won't be an option.

SUTTON